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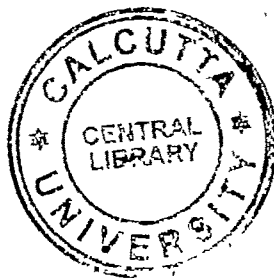
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BEGINNING FROM THE SCRATCH *

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KRISHNA CHAKRABORTTY

In the published reports researchers generally do not narrate or, if they do, give only a fragmented or cursory account of the *actual process* in and through which their investigations have been carried out. They remain silent over their personal experiences, the problems faced by them in the field, the ways how they have handled such problems, the degree and extent of their success in dealing with such crisis situations, the reasons of their failure in case they failed to cope with such situations, the fact whether, and if so how far, they could foresee such hazards, and the like issues. One reason behind their reluctance to give a detailed account of the above lies in their hesitance in bothering the audience with an account which may appear to the latter to be too personal. However, considering the very nature of the fieldwork which does not, generally speaking, follow any clearly formulated procedures or neatly designed sequential order, and success in which heavily depends on the ingenuity, luck and gift of the investigator, a discussion of the personality of researchers, their values, their familial and cultural background and the nature of their academic training may not be that uninteresting to those who have an interest in learning the nature of enactment of the research process. It is often said that research experiences are not success stories. The actual experience of research involves a good many cases of failure as well as those of success, of trying despair as well as joys. A retrospective account of these trials and tribulations, small successes and grand failures which the researchers experienced and encountered rather than an impersonal and cut and dried presentation of 'research methodology' followed by the respective social scientists may provide some useful guidance to the initiates in the arena of research or the researchers of tomorrow. By going through these discussions they may, hopefully, get some guidelines as to what one should look for in a particular range of field situations and how one should set about looking for it.

Discussions in detail of the personal experiences of researchers will be of interest also to those people who are in charge of formulating research policy and of disbursement of funds for research. In a monograph on research methodology in social sciences published by the

*This paper was read at the XVIII Indian Sociological Conference, NEHU, Shillong, 1987.

ICSSR (1974), Ramachandran has offered certain guidelines in preparing the programme on training in research methodology in India which contain *inter alia* a syllabus on 'technique and method of social investigation'. Since this point of time, or may be since its inception, the ICSSR has been consistently trying to systematize and standardize the research procedure as is evinced by its published rules for application for research grants. How helpful are these guidelines to the researchers seeking financial support for their research efforts – particularly to those who intend to engage in some intensive fieldwork? Are all the research steps and activities predictable and estimable, as is required by the ICSSR or other fund-giving agencies?

One may have a look at the experiences and opinions of sociologists and social anthropologists in India. Two interesting collections of personal experiences of investigators, (Beteille and Madan, 1975; Srinivas et al., 1979) merit the attention of one and all in this connexion. In both the volumes it has repeatedly been pointed out by the editors as well as by other contributors that there are obvious difficulties in evolving clear procedures for conducting intensive fieldwork, and that individual fieldworkers need autonomy and freedom. In the introduction to the volume edited by Srinivas and others, it has been noted, "The situations arising in the field have their own dynamics, and the fieldworkers are more often their servant than master" (1979, p. 5). Beteille and Madan have presented the issue in the following way: "A plunge into the unknown is, in fact, the most significant characteristic of all scientific endeavour. Preparation for research must not be so rigid as to eliminate flexibility in dealing with it. Unlike the natural sciences the social sciences endeavour to formulate concepts about human beings who have the gift of self-consciousness. Consequently, 'feed-back' becomes a most important resource for the social scientist" (1975, p. 6). Of course, the authors continue, "An overweening emphasis on the freedom of the individual observer must not be allowed to become an excuse for lack of methodological rigour and shoddy scholarship" (ibid, p. 5).

It is indeed difficult to adequately explain the nature of the method of intensive fieldwork in formal, general and abstract terms. One may better explicate it with concrete examples of problems actually encountered by fieldworkers in course of their fieldwork and the strategies they evolved or had to evolve to tackle the same, the specific reasons behind their success and failure. Hence, a discussion of the experiences of fieldworkers may help us identify the area(s), if any,

where it is feasible to follow a standardised research procedure, as also the arenas which should be left to the judgement and discretion of fieldworkers, to their assessment of the prevailing circumstances.

Here, I like to present how I, with very limited initial training in research methodology and with very little guidance from the teachers at the initial stage, could specify my research problem. I have narrated in the book (Chakraborty, 1978) methods followed by me in conducting research. For obvious reasons I did not mention in the book myriad additional activities which carry with them an (ultra) personal flavour. I take this opportunity to reflect as candidly as it is possible for me on my personal experience. In my judgement, the outcome of my research was influenced by the nature of the field selected for study, with my academic and personal qualities as well as by the research facilities existing at that time in the university where I worked.

When I decided to enroll myself for Ph.D. in the Department of Political Science, Calcutta University in the year 1973, the only vague idea I had about my research was that it should somehow be related to the problems of women. But I had absolutely no idea of what exactly to do or how to do it. My interest in this particular issue developed due to a fact which appeared to me significant. Since I started my undergraduate studies in a Calcutta college I met everyday, on my way to Calcutta from my natal village, a host of working mothers who too were commuters. They narrated on board the railway compartment all the different kinds of hardship they were passing through in their attempts to combine their homemaking and employee roles. It instantaneously reminded me of my grandmother who reared me and who sensitised me to the gross inequalities existing between men and women in our society. It appeared to me that the hardship of the working women was somehow related to these differential treatment to men and women in our society. I was drawn into the discussions of these women. It appeared to me that the life of the educated working women of middle class in our society was not all too happy or smooth and that the so-called "emancipation of women" from the four walls of the household has a grave face too. Naturally, I felt a bit concerned with my prospect in the role of a working lady as well as that of the women who were planning to join the workforce. These women, whose rank I liked to join, took on new roles through education and gainful employment outside home: They also began thinking in terms of emancipation of women while retaining at the same time their traditional role of homemaker, wife and mother.

As soon as I got the opportunity, I decided to collect systematic information on this theme. Thus, it was more my personal curiosity and sensitiveness to a problem in my social setting than my acquaintance with the relevant sociological literature and/or counsel of any scholar or teacher that prompted me to select the area of my research.

When I got myself registered as a Ph.D. candidate, I had little idea of the research techniques in sociology, a very scant idea of the sociological concepts and theories, and only a general idea of the theme of research. For me as a novice in research the hurdles were many and difficult. I had, of course, with me the asset of my strong determination and tenacity and the unconditional support from my family for doing whatever I liked to do.

To start with, I met my teachers for advice and guidance, but to no avail. The academic discipline which would be most relevant and helpful for the area of my research was, obviously, sociology. But the University of Calcutta was yet to start a full-fledged department of sociology. Sociology was studied but as a part of the curriculum in political science. The studies of political science and sociology in Calcutta University did not have a tradition of empirical research. The very small number of teachers who were concerned with teaching of sociology were over-burdened with teaching assignment, and as such could not afford time for the research scholars like me; nor were they convinced of the sincerity and the capability of the research scholars who, they thought, treated research fellowships or opportunities for research as mere stop-gap arrangements. The incidence of early mortality of research efforts of scholars was high indeed.

To find a way out was really difficult. But as if to prove 'where there is a will there is a way', a young and ebullient teacher in the Department, Sri S. K. Bhattacharyya (hereinafter called S.K.B.), of mine came to my rescue. Quite contrarily to the then prevailing trend in the University, he highly valued the merit of empirical research in the absence of which, he felt, theoretical discussion was bound to be barren and colourless. He, however, could not offer detailed and concrete suggestions. He advised me to read some books relating to my research theme and at the same time to study some standard works in research methodology.

At that time, i.e., in 1973, the number of books by Indian authors on the area of my research was very small. I read the limited literature available and was really benefited by the writings of Kapur (1970),

Hate (1969) and Desai (1957). Then I turned to books published in Europe and America on women and neighbouring fields. This extensive survey of literature helped me a lot in clarifying my ideas and formulating my research problem in the language of sociological research. It took almost a year for me to come to this position.

Along with reading of literature on women in and outside India, I continued to observe behaviour of my fellow passengers on board the train compartment and informally converse with them. As we travelled on board the ladies' compartment, there was no difficulty in discussing intimate and personal matters. I developed over time a relation of mutual love, friendship, affection and trust with these ladies. They found a sympathetic, patient and inquisitive listener in me, which encouraged them to freely and frankly express their opinion and illustrate their experiences regarding their efforts to combine two incompatible roles – the role of a housewife, wife and mother on the one hand and the role of an employee on the other. When they heard that I was planning to conduct a research on the problems of the employed women, they very much welcomed the idea and assured me of every possible help.

Discussions with these women enabled me to identify the kinds of problems which educated working women from the middle class background generally face. It seemed that they showed their highest concern and anxiety for the children who, according to these women, were being deprived of the care and attention of their mothers. Hence I decided to focus on the impact of maternal deprivation on the pattern of emotional and intellectual development and adjustment capability of the children of working mothers.

Simultaneously, I kept on reading books on research methodology. I read several important books on the subject and then felt the need of a teacher who could help me in my understanding of certain problems of methodology and selecting the appropriate method for my research. In the Department of Political Science at that time I found none to help me. S. K. B., however, asked me to meet the teachers in other departments in our University and elsewhere, who could help me in this respect. He himself introduced me to few such persons. In this way I met Dr. Banerjee, a Professor of Psychology (hereinafter called D. B.) working in an institute in Calcutta, who proved to be very helpful in framing and delimiting my research question. When he heard from me that my interest was to study the effect of maternal deprivation on the

children of working mothers, he expressed doubt not regarding my sincerity but about the feasibility of such a specialised study by one who had no knowledge of psychology. He advised me to read some books on child and adolescent psychology. I then began appreciating the difficulty in realising my ambition. It was a serious jolt. I understood that I did not have the intellectual equipment for studying a problem involving question of psychology. Then I had no other alternative than to abandon the study of a problem which appealed to me most directly. This sense of frustration engulfed me, as it happens in the case of other researchers in similar situation.

S. K. B. and D. B. advised me to select a problem which would be manageable by me. D. B. asked me, in addition to the carrying out of the bibliographical survey, to hold some unstructured interviews with people who had extensive experience in the field to be investigated. It would, he assured, provide me the required guidelines, directions and suggestions in formulating the hypotheses for my research and also testing the feasibility of the proposed study. It may be borne in mind that when I undertook my study the number of books and studies in India dealing with the problems of women was not large, and therefore, I got very little help from the published literature in precisely formulating the focus and design of my inquiry.

I, however, learnt a lot from the unstructured interviews with working mothers. In all I took 24 trial interviews. I maintained a considerable degree of flexibility in those interviews. It was required to facilitate the 'formulation and discovery functions' of my study which demanded that the interviews should be held in such a manner that the respondents were allowed to raise issues and questions which the investigator had not previously considered. I however, insisted that my respondents should give concrete illustrations from their experiences.

The central theme of these conversations, however, was to determine the major difficulties perceived by these working women in combining their dual burdens. These interviews strengthened the belief that all did not go well with these persons. These discussions suggested a number of research questions, one of which was selected for the systematic study, viz., the problem of reconciliation of the dual roles of the working mothers and its potential consequences on the working mothers themselves. Gradually I came to realize that the number of counter positions and the number of incumbents in each

counter position could complicate what at first appeared to be a simple situation. Hence it was necessary to make the 'relational specification' or the specification of the counter positions related with that of the *working mothers*, which could be taken into account in this particular inquiry.

Next, it was found that the failure in the performance of familial roles rather than of the role in the workplace worried working women most, and that within the family husband and children were a woman's first and foremost concern. Hence having in mind my limited resources, I was compelled to restrict the scope of my inquiry so that I could concentrate on finding the nature and kind of the incompatible expectations which the working mothers had to face from their husbands and children, and how and to what extent they could solve the problem.

This choice, however, was not that easy, and my teachers, S. K. B. and D. B., put most effort in persuading me to delimit the focus of my inquiry so that it should remain a manageable one. Accordingly, I had to curtail my ambition, and it was painful for me. In fact, each beginner, full of youthful ebullience and ambition, faces this problem in one form or another. And, it is a teacher's job to persuade the student for pruning her/his ambition and thus selecting a problem or topic that would match her/his resources.

There were some other reasons as well which led me to ultimately choose the theme on role conflict of working mothers, viz., its implication for social action, theoretical interest and opportunities for research.

Working mothers in the pilot study and in a number of other informal discussions frequently told me that the great difficulty which they had to face was with regard to (i) the looking after of their children in their absence, (ii) attending to their husbands, and (iii) managing their households. They frequently cited the massive time requirements, requirement of sound health and the exceptional physical capacity on their part for fulfilling the obligations connected with their status. They illustrated how they failed to do justice to their different role obligations in spite of their most sincere efforts, best wishes and hard work. These factual statements or of statements of experiences helped me finally pinpoint my research questions, setting the operational definitions of the key concepts and developing the interview schedule for the systematic questioning of informants.

Thus only when I could narrow the problem down to one that could reasonably be handled within a single study, I proceeded to several interrelated steps : formulation of hypotheses; clarification and formal definition of the concepts used in the hypotheses; and specification of the kinds of evidence that could serve as indicators of the various concepts, i.e., establishment of the working definitions. Decisions such as these about what information was to be collected led naturally to other steps of the research procedure : formulation of the survey instrument by which the role conflict of working mothers was to be measured, consideration of the techniques by which data were to be collected, selection of the persons from whom information was to be collected, and the selection of the locale of research.

The above account shows that though there is no set of foolproof rules to guide an investigator in formulating questions about a theme for research, it is possible to enumerate some conditions that are, as the above experience has shown, conducive to making the research problem explicit, concrete and specific. Among these conditions are systematic immersion in the subject matter through firsthand observation, the study of existing literature as extensively as possible, and discussion with persons who have a lot of practical experience in the field related to the theme preliminarily chosen for study. Attempts should be made for a simultaneous realization of all these conditions. Further, this preliminary observation, reading and discussion are to be conducted in a constantly critical, analytic and imaginative frame of mind, otherwise there is a possibility that the researcher may fail to be sensitive to the new and unexpected ideas and insights coming to her/him.

Once a researcher selects her/his research area, she is haunted by the thought that her/his first task is to discover a problem in need of a solution. With this fact in mind s/he should read books and talk to the subjects. Also whatever question occur to her/his, s/he should discuss them with her/his teachers who can guide her/him in channelising her/his inquiry. To repeat, a friendly critic is a great help for a researcher, whether this critic is her/his guide or fellow researcher or some other informed and interested person.

Finally, a successful completion of an inquiry requires some luck and gift on the part of the researcher. I can now remember how fortunate I was to find out an area which was most directly related to that sense of curiosity which had been roused in me long back by some

of the members in my family. This paved the way for my immersion in the subject of my research. I found a set of extremely cooperative informants whose unstinted co-operation helped me formulate and reformulate my research questions and see many intimate aspects of the problem which would have otherwise in all probability eluded me. I came across a few friendly critics in the academic circle at those moments just when I despaired. In this country where libraries are mostly ill-equipped, information of or access to literature proves to be another fortuitous factor. My physical health and capacity for taking pains and my full freedom from family encumbrances have contributed a lot in completing my venture. These chance factors along with a curious, analytic, sensitive and imaginative frame of mind make a research venture successful.

Finally, it may be possible to complete a sample survey within a stipulated period of time with a specified budget estimate, but it is totally unpredictable to state how much investment will be required to get some *insight* into the problem under investigation.

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CLASS-DIFFERENTIAL IN BENGALI IDIOMS AND USAGES

DEBKUMAR BANERJEE*

Bengali society, like any other society, is not homogeneous. It is divided into sex groups, age groups, occupational groups, regional groups, religious groups, and so on. One of the most significant of various divisions in Bengali society is the division into a number of social classes. Each of these various divisions in society leads to a differential in the language spoken by the people, differentials which faithfully reflect the fact of social division. The object of the present paper is to explore the differential in Bengali language that stems from the class-divisions in Bengali society. As such, it may be considered as an humble venture in socio-linguistics or rather the sociology of language.

Language expresses our thought. And, whether we consciously admit it or not, we sub-consciously think in terms of our class-interests and class-values. The Bengali language naturally is a mirror, often clouded though by a conscious effort to hide the class-bias, of the social attitudes of the individuals belonging to different classes. And it may be noted in this connection that the propertied classes – the landlords, the capitalists and to some extent the middle class – traditionally control the idioms and usages of Bengali language, that is, the means of expression, just as they control the means of production.¹

In class-divided societies, the form of addressing a person usually expresses the class-ranks of the person speaking and the person spoken to. There is one form of addressing people who are lower in class-rank and another for those whose class-rank is equal to that of the speaker or higher. The way one addresses people of a lower class-rank is, however, usually the same as the way he addresses those who are close to him as kins or friends or junior to him by age. This mix up veils the class-connotation of the form of address. As examples of alternate forms of address we may mention the pronouns *tu* and *vous* in French, *tu* and *Lei* in Italian, etc. In English, *you* is used in all cases, *thou* having gone out of use, and the class-difference between the person speaking

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and the person spoken to is expressed in other ways. In Bengali, the higher ups in the social ladder are addressed as *apni*, the lower downs as *tui*, and those in between as *tumi*. The *ap*, *tumi*, *tu* in Hindi parallels the use of *apni*, *tumi*, *tui* in Bengali. A similar triple form of address is also found in Assamese, Oriya, etc. The interesting thing is that though we use these forms of address so many times everyday, many of us are not aware of the fact that they have a class-connotation. I once asked my students in a post-graduate Sociology class how they would decide whether to address some one with whom they were not acquainted, as *apni*, *tumi* or *tui*. Most of the students answered that that would depend on the age of the addressed person, an elder would be addressed as *apni*, an younger as *tumi*, and *tui* as an endearing term would be confined to those who happened to be very intimate. In a sense, the answer is a correct one. The choice of the form of address has indeed in certain contexts something to do with the age of the addressed person. But that is not the whole story. Do we address an old sweeper as *apni*? Do we address a District Magistrate who is younger to us in age as *tumi*? We do not. We select the form of address on the basis of the social rank of the person in question, and one's dress, in lieu of a more reliable social indicator, reveals his social rank to others. Thus we address a man or woman in a coarse, cheap, torn or dirty dress as *tumi* or *tui* and a man or woman in a fine, costly, neat and clean dress as *apni*. If the profession of the person is known to us in addition, it becomes easier for us to select the appropriate form of address. Thus we address an engineer, a doctor, a teacher, a lawyer, etc. as *apni*, but a servant, a sweeper, a day-labourer, a rickshaw puller, a coolie, etc., as *tumi* or *tui*. [Of the two words *tumi* and *tui*, *tui* is used to address those who, in our estimation, are lower in social rank than even those whom we address as *tumi*.] This way of choosing the form of address on a sartorial or occupational basis often leads to quite anomalous positions. For example, we may address an old sweeper as *tumi* but his educated well-placed son as *apni*. Any way, the faculty of differentiating people according to their class-status becomes ingrained in us in Bengali society, as in many other societies, from our childhood, through the process of socialisation, and we can choose afterwards the socially appropriate and approved form of address to different classes of people without any effort.

I would like to add here that the selection of the form of address on the basis of age and that on the basis of social rank are not really as disconnected as they might appear at first sight. We address elders as *apni* and juniors as *tumi* or *tui* because age itself has traditionally been

an indicator of one's rank in our society. The higher the age, the higher one's social rank. Similarly, the higher one's class or caste, the higher the social rank. Thus, both classifications form parts of a well-entrenched heritage of hierarchy, the essence of which has been social inequality. Naturally, those who enjoy a higher rank, whether on age or class or caste ground, have traditionally enjoyed the privilege of being addressed more respectfully than those of a lower rank.

Two words which are frequently used in Bengali language to express the fact of social dichotomy are *bhadralok* and *chhotolok*, the second being the antonym of the first.² It is difficult to translate these two words into English because they have connotations in Bengali which are not conveyed fully by any English words. Roughly, a *bhadralok* is a 'gentleman', *bhadra* meaning 'gentle' and *lok* meaning 'man'. In this sense the reference is to one's manners, and a person belonging to any class could be a *bhadralok*. Literally, *chhotolok* means a small man, *chhoto* meaning 'small' in Bengali. As an antonym of *bhadralok*, however, *chhotolok* means a person whose manners are not gentle, civil and polished. Any person, irrespective of his class status can, in this sense, be a *chhotolok*. In Bengali language these two words are, of course, sometimes used in such senses. A well-to-do person can be pejoratively classed a *chhotolok* because of his bad manners and evil deeds. But normally the word *bhadralok* is used to denote a person hailing from the upper classes, and similarly the word *chhotolok* is used to denote a person belonging to the lower classes. Thus, if a well-dressed, and hence presumably upper class, person comes to the residence of Mr. X to meet him, and Mr. X is not present in his residence then, his family members would tell him when he returns that a *bhadralok* came to meet him. If the visitor was not well-dressed and hence presumably one belonging to the lower classes, the family members would not use the word *bhadralok* while referring to him. Just as a male person belonging to the upper classes is a *bhadralok*, a female person belonging to the upper classes is a *bhadramahila*, a lady. A maid servant is not a *bhadramahila*, nor a peasant woman or woman belonging to the working class. Women belonging to well-to-do families are *bhadramahilas*, even if they are uneducated and have bad manners. Many *jotedars* or rural rich are heard these days in West Bengal to say that the Left Front Government has given too much indulgence to *chhotoloks*, using *chhotoloks* synonymously with poor people or low caste people. It is interesting to note here that in the case of the person who came to meet Mr. X or the poor ruralites whom the Left Front Government is alleged to have pampered, may or may not have gentle

and good manners, because their behaviour pattern is either not known to the speaker or at least not being complained against. The usage is, however, possibly a hangover of a belief that the well-to-do, educated, high caste persons necessarily have good manners and the poor, uneducated, low caste persons have bad manners to deserve the respective descriptions – *bhadralok* and *chhotolok*.

The *bhadralok* – *chhotolok* dichotomy in Bengali language does not, of course, fully agree with the pattern of class-division in society delineated by Karl Marx. Marx would define classes in terms of ownership/non-ownership of the means of production, but the so classed *bhadralok* and *chhotolok* classes are not strictly classes in that Marxist sense of the term. However, the ownership criterion is not altogether absent either in the Bengali conception of the *bhadralok*. And as these are not scientific terms but only terms in usage, the terms *bhadralok* and *chhotolok* naturally do not have a very precise meaning and are, in fact, amalgams of class, caste and cultural components. A *bhadralok*, thus, is simultaneously an upper class, a high caste and an educated person, though there may be cases where one or the other of these dimensions may be lacking.

A *bhadralok*, in any case, can engage himself in certain professions only, and there are professions which are a taboo to him. Certain professions are not looked upon with favour by the Bengali upper classes and the higher castes and the names of these professions are used to denigrate individuals who do not belong to such professions, for some lapse, fault or misdeed on their part. Thus, calling someone a *chasa* or cultivator amounts to calling him an uneducated, uncultured, unmannerly person, the assumption being that the cultivator is so. Similarly, calling a person a *chammar* or a person dealing in hides means calling him inordinately cruel. Calling a person a *kasai* or butcher is another way of describing someone as very cruel. These stereotypes clearly reflect the stratified nature of Bengali society in which most categories of manual work are looked down upon and all undesirable qualities are attributed to those who are engaged in such work. Such usages, needless to say, do not incorporate the truth, because a *chasa* may not be uneducated and unmannerly, nor a *chamar* or *kasai* necessarily cruel and hard-hearted. A brahmin or a well-to-do person, on the other hand, need not necessarily be educated, courteous and kind. These usages, however, do reveal the way in which the upper classes in Bengali society look at certain lower class occupations.

The particular word that is prefixed or suffixed to one's name while addressing him or referring to him is an indicator of the class status of the addressee and the class consciousness of the addressor. In Bengali, people who are high up in official or social position are referred to or addressed as Bose *Saheb*, Chatterjee *Saheb*, etc. If the persons concerned hold socially lower clerical posts, they become Bose *babu*, Chatterjee *babu*, and the like. If they are still lower in the social hierarchy they become just Bose and Chatterjee without a *Mr.* before or a *saheb* or *babu* after their surnames, or they may be called or referred to by their first names. Thus, an officer will address or refer to one Ram Bose as Bose or Ram and use the pronoun *tumi* while talking to him if that Ram Bose is his orderly. But if that Ram Bose is his superior officer, he will be addressed or referred to as Mr. Bose or Bose *Saheb*, and the pronoun *apni* will be used while talking to him. Such usages in Bengali language are so well-entrenched in Bengali social life, that those who are officially or socially lower in rank usually do not mind the linguistic discrimination by those who are higher up in the hierarchy, that is, do not consider the differential in language as humiliating or insulting. Such a differential is, however, disappearing in certain contexts. In election campaigns, for example, when the candidate and his agents move from house to house to solicit votes, every potential voter becomes a respected person, becomes a *babu* and is addressed as *apni*, no matter what his class rank is and what the normal form of addressing him would have been in the absence of the election imperative. Incidentally, this example illustrates the fact that the equalising effect of political democracy is felt also in the linguistic sphere.

In Bengali psyche, doing an office job is prestigious, those who do it are *bhadraloks*. They are *chakure*, *sarkari-chakure* (government servant) being especially respectable. But those who do domestic service are *chakar*; they are *chhotoloks*. The subtle difference between *chakure* and *chakar* is not missed by any Bengalee, because the class-nature of the two categories is made obvious to him through his socialisation. It exemplifies how the social context may create a differential in language even where there is no etymological basis for it.

The Bengali language has observed a large number of English words in its vocabulary during the period of British rule in India. Some English words like *table*, *chair*, *fan*, *electricity*, *cinema*, *football*, etc. have become part and parcel of the Bengali language and all Bengalees irrespective of class and caste use these words in their conversation. But only the upper class, usually higher caste, people use English

expressions like *thank you, sorry, good morning, congratulation*, etc. and their Bengali speech is often interspersed with English phrases and even entire English sentences. In fact, the capability of using English words and expressions with reasonable frequency while conversing in Bengali is considered to be a *sine qua non* of a Bengali *bhadralok*. *Ceteris paribus*, the percentage of English words in one's conversation in Bengali is likely to be a reliable indicator of one's class-rank in Bengali society. It will be an interesting study if this hypothesis is tested by recording the speech for say ten minutes of each person from two samples, one drawn from Bengalees belonging to the middle class and classes above it and another from classes below the middle class like worker, artisans, etc. If each of these individuals is requested to talk on a common theme for a given duration, and the percentage of English words in the speech be calculated, a very revealing empirical picture is likely to emerge.

Just as the percentage of English words is likely to be higher in the vocabulary of Bengali upper classes relative to that of the lower classes, similarly, the percentage of *tatsama* (identical with Sanskrit) and *tatbhava* (derived from Sanskrit) words also is likely to be higher. The class-caste complex is easily discernible in Bengali Hindu society, the upper classes are nearly the same as the higher castes. Exceptions are, of course, there; but exceptions only prove the rule. The higher castes having been traditionally more Sanskritic in their life style and language, the upper classes have also naturally become so. The lower castes are mostly recruits to Hinduism from non-Aryan tribes, and in course of their assimilation in Bengali Hindu society, they have brought into the Bengali language in general and the lower castes' twang in particular, a host of words of *Kol* and *Dravidian* origin. And as lower castes predominate the lower classes in Bengali society, a socio-linguistic study of the speech of such people is expected to establish the existence of a greater percentage of non-Aryan words in it than in the speech of upper class people.

Use of slang is taken by some as hallmark of the lower classes' twang. Beginning with *shala* or brother-in-law, there is a long list of unprintable slangs in the repertoire of Bengali language. Some Bengali writers put such slang in the mouth of characters of working class or peasant origin to convey the impression that the characters are authentic. I am, however, of the opinion that though there may be a small grain of truth in the view that lower class people use slang quite liberally, it is neither true that slang is a monopoly of the *chhotoloks* nor

that to the *bhadraloks* slang is a taboo. Actually, slang is lumpen language. And it is interesting to note that in modern Bengali society the lumpen fringe of the *chhotoloks* coalesces with the lumpen fringe of the *bhadraloks* both socially and linguistically. In short, Bengali *khisti-kheir* or slang has nothing exclusively proletarian about it.

By contending that there is a class-differential in Bengali idioms and usages, I am not claiming that the upper classes and the lower classes in Bengali society speak two different languages. Nor am I suggesting that there are no intra-class linguistic differences. I do not think either that the class differential is the only differential in Bengali language which is worth studying. In the perspective of the sociology of language, it is meaningful to investigate also the sex differential, the age differential and so on, and to correlate them with social realities. Nor do I seek to controvert Stalin's contention that "..... national languages are not class, but common languages, common to all the members of each nation and constituting the single language of that nation".³ What I have tried to say in this paper is that Bengali language is *interalia*, a faithful mirror of social stratification and that the idioms and usages in Bengali language often have a class-connotation apart from their lexical meaning. And if this be true, many of the most commonly used Bengali words and expressions could well be a clue to an understanding of the attitudes, values, etc., of different sections of the Bengali people.

Ideally, no one is a *bhadralok per se* or a *chhotok per se*. But traditionally Bengali upper classes have thought of the existence of two such types of people and the Bengali lower classes have not challenged this conceptual dichotomy of society. As what people think is reflected in their acts, this belief in the division of society into *bhadraloks* and *chhotoloks* has been mirrored in Bengali behavioural patterns, patterns of social interaction. Education, of course, continually acts as a great leveller and narrows down the gulf between these two segments of society. So does political democracy with its stress on equality of citizens. Mass media like films also have the effect of closing the gap between the elite and the commoners. But when all is said and done, the traditional linguistic reflections of social inequality itself does not disappear. Till then, an understanding of the class differential in idioms and usages will be as necessary to decipher the meaning of written and spoken words of a language as a knowledge of its grammar and lexicon. And the class-context of social relations will as much

reveal the sense that language conveys as language reveals the state of social relations in a class-divided society.

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1. The dominant section of society controls the means of expression in many ways. The people belonging to the dominated section, for example, may have to express their humility and servility by using certain special words or phrases while referring to themselves or their possessions. The 'untouchables' in the Malabar area have to call their children 'calves', their silver 'copper', and their paddy 'chaff'. The Pulyan (a very low caste dare not say 'I', but 'adiyan', that is, 'your slave'. The Tiyan (another very low caste) cannot speak of their own eyes and ears as eyes and ears. They have to add an adjective before these words, namely, 'old', and say 'old eye' and 'old ear'. See Hutton, J. H. *Caste in India : Its Nature, Function and Origins*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, Calcutta, Madras, 4th ed., 1963, p. 87.
2. "..... the concept of *bhadralok* class and its complement, *chhotolok* class coined from the terms applied in Bengali to distinguish the gentlemen (*bhadralok*) from the commoners (*chhotolok*), represent a broad distinction applied in the cultural (and, thence, 'social') identification of the Bengalis over centuries and irrespective of the changes the Bengali society has undergone during the Hindu, Pathan, Mughal and the British rule and afterwards." Ramkrishna Mukherjee. *Sociology of Indian Sociology*, Allied Publishers. Bombay, New Delhi, etc. 1979, p. 88.
3. Stalin 'Concerning Marxism in Linguistics' in *Selected Writings : J. V. Stalin*, vol. II, National Book Agency, Calcutta, 1976, p. 256.

While denying the "class character" of language, Stalin does recognise the influence of classes on language. "Yes, classes influence language, introduce into the language their own specific words and expression and sometimes understand one and the same word or expression differently." Stalin, 'Concerning Certain Problems of Linguistics' in *Ibid.*, p. 277.

GLIMPSES OF THE RURAL SCENARIO IN WEST BENGAL - A CASE OF ARRESTED CHANGE ?*



Swapan Kumar Bhattacharyya**

[1]

Since the end of the sixties sociologists have been forced to change their conceptual baggage and theoretical approaches in studying the rural social structure and processes in West Bengal because of the thunderous Naxalite Movement which was but one kind of manifestation of a "tradition" of dissent from and protest against the *status quo* in land relations in Bengal in British India and West Bengal in Independent India.

An analysis of the social relations in the countryside in West Bengal is not possible without an awareness of these heroic struggles of the peasants like the Tebhaga Movement (Sen, 1972; Sarkar, 1986) or their attempts at organising themselves through organisations like Kishan Sabha (Sen, op. cit.; Rasul, 1974). If the various land reform measures, mainly legislative in character, taken by the State Government somehow succeeded in managing the tension in the first few years after the promulgation of the Constitution, they abjectly failed in controlling the rage of the frustrated peasants during the years of collapse of the Congress Government. If the Congress Government was seen as the representative of the landlords and their allies, those who tried to bring it down professed a restructuring of the land relations which formed the bedrock of social relations in the countryside. It is no gainsaying the fact that the Naxalbari peasant revolt and Naxalbari movement in general which "owes its origin to the dying waves of tebhaga movement in Bengal" (Mukherjee, 1982) and put primacy on the land problem and started a kind of mass struggle with the guerilla squads spearheading it for the seizure of political power could appear in the changed milieu. Though the Movement failed to achieve its goal because of the failure of the actors in the system to internalise the contradictions through experience before subjectively preparing for

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the struggle (Mukherjee, op. cit.), the fact that it struck terror in the hearts of the landed gentry throughout the countryside in West Bengal revealed the inadequacy of the structural-functional or other approaches highlighting the element of consensus or harmony among the different segments of the rural society or analysing such factors as religion, caste, kinship or faction as the dominant forces in rural life. A new consciousness of the people and a consequent restructuring of social relations were in sight.

It is interesting that the serious contenders of the Naxalbari approach comprised not only the followers of the Congress Party but those of the CPI (M), the most dominant leftist party in the scene. The CPI (M) and its allies did not deny the extremely unsatisfactory nature of the then existing land relations but thought that the objective situation was not ripe for starting a revolutionary struggle. They preferred, unlike the Naxalites, participating in the election process favoured by the constitution, ameliorating the conditions of the rural proletariat within limited powers, and laying bare in the process the basic weakness of the system and preparing the masses for revolution through sensitizing them to the weakness.

The two legs of the efforts of the CPI (M) led Left Front were (1) The implementation of the panchayati raj through regular election of the panchayat bodies on the basis of universal adult franchise and devolution or decentralisation of the planning process and the process of implementing the measures for rural development and (2) the "Operation Barga" and other Land Reform Measures.

The CPI (M) led Left Front Government held the election to Panchayats in 1978 and these elections were held on party lines much to the chagrin of the advocates of partyless democracy at least at the rural level. The purpose of the CPI (M) and its allies was obviously to politicise the rural masses. They needed it for creating a favourable climate for the land reform measures and other changes they proposed.

Some of the land reform measures aimed at proper execution of the provisions of Acts like Restoration of Alienated Land Act and West Bengal Acquisition of Homestead Land (for Fishermen, Artisans and Agricultural Labourers) Act, which were passed in 1975, i.e., prior to the advent of the Left Front Government. The others were passing of new legislations or amendment of existing Acts, for example, the Land holding Act of 1979 which aimed at the replacement of the feudal rent

system by a more rational and equitable system of levy on landholding based on fertility of soil, type of crop produced, proximity to the marketing centre to other advantages of landholding or insertion of a clause to subsection 8 (dealing with the definition of "personal cultivation") of Section 2 of West Bengal Land Reforms Act. But the "most important factor in Left Front Government's total package programme for rural transformation is 'Operation Barga'. The operation encouraged share croppers to register themselves so that the legal rights to the land they cultivate year in and year out could be firmly established" (Govt. of West Bengal, n.d.).

According to the Government sources, the number of bargadars "would amount to between 30 and 35 lakhs" i.e., between 3 and 3.5 millions. The added clause referred to above provides that those who want to cultivate the land themselves will have to spend the greater part of the year living on the land themselves or with their families. Another clause has been inserted to the effect that those who cultivate the land themselves will have to consider the income from that land as their principal source of income. A further revision in the Act says that if anyone tries to evict share-cropper illegally, he will be held responsible under the law and will be prosecuted accordingly. To facilitate the work of recording the names of the share-croppers, the necessary amendments of law stipulate that if the share croppers do not receive their receipts for the produce handed over to the owners of the lands, the owner will be sentenced to imprisonment for 6 months or compelled to pay a fine of Rs. 1,000/- or he may be liable to imprisonment and the fine simultaneously. The receipt which the share-cropper will receive will constitute the principal instrument for the recognition of his rights. The aim of the Government has been to prevent the eviction of bargadars and to place the onus of proving that a certain person is not a bargadar with respect to a particular plot on the shoulder of the one who seek to deny the right of a person as a bargadar.

But, since the Government is a popular government it had to see that in the case of some indigent individuals who happen to be owners of small plots of land and who, on account of circumstances, are unable to cultivate their lands and have to go in for share-cropping, Operation Barga might lead to a depletion of the market value of lands they continue to own legally. "These category of owners often include primary teachers, employees and professional people who had to move away from Villages, and widows who obviously cannot cultivate on their own."

"To obviate their difficulties, the Government has decided to set up a land transaction agency; a sum of rupees 50 lacks is being initially placed at its disposal in the budget for 1980-81" (ibid : 10).

However, it is noteworthy to mention that Operation Barga could attain initially a tremendous success *because panchayat bodies, peasant organisations* were involved in getting the barga "cases registered. Thus after the introduction of Operation Barga in September 1978, the average rate of recording increased significantly, by about 300 per cent, attaining a figure of 32,000 recordings per month by January, 1979. The total number of bargadars as recorded upto October 1979 reached 7.5 lakhs. According to the records as on 31st December 1979, the number of recorded bargadars stood at 7,85,117. Indeed, during the first four – five years the target of 1 million was achieved (Khasnobis, 1981; A-45). And, one must admit that the political will geared the administrative machinery and provided strong support to people's participation in order to achieve the end. But, the problem arose when the tempo slowed down. Between August 1979 and April 1980, only about 1,21,700 bargadars opted for recording their names. The figure for April 1980 to March 1981 is still lower (idem). And it "is to the credit (1) of the Left Front Government West Bengal that it alone could record 1.34 million tenants by November 1986 through a special campaign called Operation Barga" (Chattopadhyay, 1989 : II).

What was the reason of the slowing down of the rate of recording ? In the 'Biswanath Ghosh Vs the State of West Bengal' case on the legal validity of the procedures adopted by the Left Front Government in organising the records of barga rights, the Hon'ble High Court observed that the association of the rural workers, e.g., peasant leaders, in the process of recording is legally unsound. Government officials must not seek the advice of such workers in the process of recording the names. After this judgement, thousands of ex parte injunction orders have been obtained by landowners and the recording process has been severely impeded; the pace of recording has also slowed down.

Now, the blame has been laid by the "politically committed" bureaucracy in the State at the door of the judicial institution (Bose, n.d.) And, the "intellectual politicians" take the plea of limited power of the States in the Indian Union and the framework of the Indian Constitution. One does not, however, understand why no appeal was made against the verdict of the High Court. Does it expose the timidity of the political will or the political compulsions of the ruling front ?

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Further, as Khasnabis points out, even with limited power of a State Government, the Government in Kerala particularly under the Achuta Menon Ministry did not allow the 1969 Act (i.e., the Land Reforms Bill of 1969) to be nullified by the court and that the consent of the centre was sought on the proposal to include the 1969 Act, the 1971 Amendment and the Private Forest and Kannan Devan confiscatory legislation in the 9th Schedule of the Constitution (which was accompanied by the 29th Amendment of the Constitution in May, 1972). In Kerala, thanks to the relentless struggle of the peasantry there developed a unique situation. All the major political parties, both ruling and opposition, had to take note of the popular sentiment and act accordingly. This only could explain the radical gesture even of the Congress party. Does such a situation prevail in West Bengal? The answer is, one is afraid, in the negative. A certain kind of complacency on the part of the partners in the ruling front and their anxiety over losing their vote bank in the rural areas and their eagerness to supplicate the big and middle peasants seem to have halted the process of change triggered by the Left Front Government.

One cannot expect that in such a situation the tenancy right of bargadars would be in the near future converted into conferment of proprietary rights on the tenants (Khasnabis, 1986 : 178).

Further, the Government is reluctant, as has been demonstrated in the candid admission of the Food Minister in recent times, to procure paddy/rice through levy on the peasants because it might lead to a loss of the peasants' support for them in their rural bastions.

While every time the blame for the difficulties in effecting any radical reform for the welfare of the masses is shifted on to the Government at the Centre, the State has not uptill now dared impose any tax on income from agriculture, though the matter falls in the State List.

Further, even to-day in the State where share-croppers fought long back for tebhaga (three fourths) share of the produce, a prominent left intellectual closely associated with the CPI(M), has to confess that "we would have to go a long way before the legal three-fourths share for the share-cropper contributing all the inputs including labour would be attainable" (Dasgupta, 1984). Are the changes which are much advertised only skin-deep? And, is not the process of sharpening of class contradictions abandoned for conciliation of class interests because of the political compulsions of winning vote with the help of the groups that are powerful in rural West Bengal?

[II]

The claim of Panchayats' giving real power to the downtrodden is thus not well founded. Further, from a study of a West Bengal Village by the author and a colleague of his it has been revealed that the Panchayat election initially promised a transfer of village power from the vested interests to the common people who had hitherto been deprived of any power. But it has failed to keep its promise (Chakraborty and Bhattacharyya, forthcoming). Under the cloak of political party and party ideology, power changes hands from one group of the influential (propertied) segment of the village to another group. And, political party or its ideology has hardly succeeded in overcoming the influence of primordial ties like kinship or faction based on that. Also, the lowest stratum in the village, the Bagdis, a Scheduled Caste, has not been in a position to see any one of its members as a member of any one of the Panchayat bodies.

[III]

The oversaturation of the panchayat bodies with political consideration, the only aim of which is the winning of votes, has seriously interfered with the activities of voluntary agencies, some of which want genuinely the welfare of the villages (the genuineness is attested by nobody else than the villagers themselves) (Bhattacharyya and Chakraborty, 1988). A Panchayat Samity dominated by a particular political party in its eagerness to take the credit of every measure of the uplift of the villagers, that is, for their voters, will not allow anybody else to do anything for the villagers, if it does not mean a credit for the particular party dominating the panchayat. This is the finding, true, of a micro-level study in a backward district in West Bengal, i.e. Purulia. But the dangerous portent is showing itself up in other areas as well. Hence, the doubt arises as to whether the process of rural change has become halting in West Bengal after the third victory of the Left Front Government in West Bengal.

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SOCIETY, CULTURE AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN - WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO INDIA

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The fact of violence against women becomes all too evident when one gets the word FEMICIDE in current usage in English. One would consult the English language dictionaries published in the seventies, even in the first half of the eighties, in vain to look up the meaning of the word. But, grimly enough, the word has come to stay. "FEMICIDE" is just another word for murder of women, whether from the moment they are conceived to when they are born (female infanticide), on to the burning bride and the self denial of motherhood". ("The problem" in the *Seminar*, No. 331, March 1987, page 12). It is not a phenomenon restricted to countries like India only but is the experience world over. While India knew of female infanticide and the burning of widows, the killing of female foetus and self-denial (?) of motherhood are the 'boons' of modernization of a grotesque form.

Violence does not mean physical violence only. It implies psychological torture also. If we accept an extended meaning of the word, we should accept it as suggesting the denial of identity, autonomy and opportunity for self-expression to any individual or group. From this point of view, the story of human civilization is a sordid tale of suffering and sorrow of the women folk at the hands of their male counterparts. That it is not merely an expression of emotionality but a fact is buttressed by the lack of concern over the use of appropriate word, noun or pronoun, for women who constitute almost the half of a human race. The author has elsewhere pointed out (Bhattacharyya, 1988), a Feminist Dictionary in English has become necessary to correct the mistake created through subsuming women under the generic form Man and that this correction was necessary because of the denial of right to practice in the High Court at Calcutta to Late Regina Guha, a female Law graduate of the Calcutta University because the then relevant piece of law did not mention specifically 'woman' or 'lady' or she in its stipulation of qualifications of an advocate. That the experience in India was not an exception but an expression of a general rule is borne by the appearance of the *Feminist Dictionary* and the entire gamut of literature supporting it.

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When one comes to India one notes with concern (or with no concern at all ?) the sex-ratio in India which has become increasingly adverse for women. Society and culture too have some role in it. Generally, the sex ratio, i.e., the number of females per 1000 males, of a population is considered to be the result of biological and social factors. One of the very disturbing findings in the recent period has been the fact that girls at birth have less survival chances than boys, which is contrary to the situation in various other countries. Sex-ratio has been adverse (for women) in India. But what is more disturbing is the declining female population over the years. In the year 1901, for every 1000 males, there were 972 females; in 1981 the number of surviving females is 935 ! Again, there are regional disparities, with states like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa showing still further decline. With wide use of technology of the prior information of the sex of the child to be born for aborting female foetuses, the trend would be still more adverse for women.

That the value-system and social structure had an important place in determining the attitude and action towards women is proved by the regional disparities in India not only at present but in the past. That in Rajasthan female infanticide was widely practised is known to many. In Rajasthan the practice of widow – burning too was known. But at one time, the practice of Sati was the most prevalent in Bengal. And, the need for Brahman girls for isogamy (Kulin Brahman female = Kulin Brahman male) and hypergamy (srotriya or non-Kulin Brahman female = Kulin Brahman male) and injunctions against their hypogamy (Kulin Brahman girl \neq non Kulin Brahman groom) down-graded the position of women to an abyss. The total denial of female personality resulting from it has been depicted in many Bengali novels. The audience may recall the story of Rajlakshmi in *Srikanta* by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay. What is however interesting is the absence of evidence of the practice of female infanticide in Bengal to the extent in which it was practised in regions like Rajasthan. Why it was so is definitely a matter of investigation by historians with a sociological imagination. But what it suggests beyond doubt is the differential impact of two different subcultures (Rajasthan and Bengal) on the status or social position of women, which depends on the attitude and behaviour of others in society towards women.

And, herein lies the role of the sociologists as well the non-sociologists. True, men and women are born in a socio-cultural milieu

which exercises constraints on their behaviour. But there is no point in reifying the milieu so that it appears as an unchanging and unchangeable juggernaut. Men and women with strong purpose and resolute will can change it. The efforts of Rammohan, Vidyasagar, Vivekananda, Phoolley or Gandhi are an indicator of that obvious and probably, therefore, often-forgotten fact. Their greatness lies not only in their individual geniuses but in their rousing the consciousness of the people and mobilising their efforts for changing the then norms and values in favour of the disprivileged women. It is the common people that have woven the pattern of history, though with the motifs provided by great men. Any seminar or conference or workshop on women's status must, therefore, try to arouse and sensitize the common men and women to the kind of role which they can play in changing their socio-cultural order in a desired direction. For this, the first necessary step consists in the analysis and understanding of the existing socio-cultural arrangement, which is sought to be changed. And, when one tries to do that, one discovers with dismay how the common people behave as captives of an iron-cage of their own creation. To take one example. Bride-burning is a burning issue in this country. The daily newspapers published from Calcutta contain almost every day a reported case of bride-burning or a report of a case in the law-court against bride-burning or suicides by daughter-in-laws because of the alleged torture by her in-laws. And, one of the commonest reasons rendered for such incidents is the dispute over or dissatisfaction with dowry. Theoretically or for arguments' sake every one of us would condemn dowry. But, it is we who would in a sophisticated way or in a honeyed voice would want dowry for our brothers, sons or male relatives. This is bound to be so, it may be argued, because we had or have to give dowry to the groom's party when we want to get our daughters married. But what about our behaviour, when we, the women hastily walk or run to see a newly-wed bride alighting from a car or a taxi, on hearing the Uludhwani and the sound of blowing of the conchshells? What do we see than? Do we not watch the ornaments on the person of the bride? As guests to the dinner on the occasion of Baubhat, do we not measure the tolas of gold on the person of the bride as also the quantity and quality of other articles that have come from the bride's house? If we do not take cash from the bride's party, do we not boastfully declare that to the others in presence of the bride herself? Do not some of us who have not got from the families of their son's wives the amount of goods and articles which their neighbours' sons have received in marriage from their in-laws, lament over the fact in private or even in public?

Education or modernization has hardly changed this world-view of ours, which is the outcome of a male dominated culture. Indeed, the more educated and/or affluent a groom is, the higher is the demand for dowry. If one takes the capital city of Delhi, which houses the most "enterprising" and "modernized" of the Indians, one notes with horror the high incidence of bride-burning in the city. Kelkar (1985) points out over a ten-day period between May 24 and June 4 in 1985 fifteen women died of burns in the city. But it was not a new phenomenon in Delhi, the author pointed out. In 1981, the Union Minister of state for Home Affairs had stated in the parliament that the reported "women burning incidents" in Delhi stood at 394 in 1980. According to official figures 332 cases of 'accidental burning' were reported in 1982 as against 305 in 1981. These figures show that nearly one woman is being incinerated everyday in the capital. But according to various women's organisations, an equal number of accidental burning cases go unreported. Many times this is on account of the refusal of police to register the cases. "The dowry witch - hunt has", observes Kelkar, "taken its heaviest toll in the middle class urban areas, but the burning of women for more money and domestic goods in the form of dowry is quite widespread in the slums and rural areas" (1985 : 1)

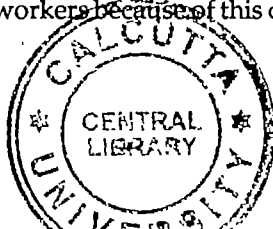
The latter part of the foregoing statement proves how exploitation of and violence against women have been perpetuated among the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated, the rural and the urban, the occupants of posh-apartments and the slum-dwellers alike. The norms and values of the rich and the educated have percolated down to the poor and uneducated, though the wealth and privileges of the former have not. In a survey of a Calcutta slum (Rajabazar), S. K. Bhattacharyya and a colleague of his in the Calcutta University, namely, Dr. Krishna Chakraborty, noted a sharp increase in female literacy among the Muslims in the bustee in comparison with what was observed in an earlier survey of the same bustee by Uma Guha of the Anthropological Survey of India. But Bhattacharyya and Chakraborty also discerned a concern of the Muslim mothers over the fact of rising educational standard of their daughters. On further probing, it came out that the cause of anxiety of the Muslim mothers was that they would have to find out better educated grooms for their school going daughters and they would have to pay a handsome amount in cash and kind to the grooms. Thus, the fear of dowry has come to the Muslim women also and it would not be illogical to apprehend that it would act as a damper on farther education of women. Indeed, the trend manifested itself in the aforesaid bustee in

Calcutta is reluctant attitude of the parents towards the education of their daughters beyond class VIII. A girl who passed the "Madhyamik" Examination would want to continue her study and a good match for her would demand a dowry that might lie beyond the capacity of the parents (Bhattacharyya and Chakraborty, 1984).

Education might arm women with some kind of protection against many violence against them in future, though it is not, as it is evident from what has been said above, a panacea. But even this education is denied to them. Before the primary schooling is over, nearly 50 percent of the girls dropped out of education system in India (in 1975-76). Comparing the situation of girls with that of the boys, say in middle school, we find that enrolment for boys is 63 percent while for girls it is 36 percent. It is no wonder that in the total enrolment in higher education women constitute about 30%, i.e., less than one-third. And, the overwhelming bulk of these women is to be found in arts subjects (enrolment of girls in science and commerce streams is very low).

Thus the perpetuation of inequities against women is ensured by barring their entry into the employment market through a particular mechanism in the sphere of education. First, women are not allowed to proceed beyond a level; secondly, they would not be allowed an entry in those branches of learning which ensure better and more remunerative employment.

Again, what is the picture in the economic sphere? In 1901, 31.70 percent of the female population were recorded as female workers, in 1981 the percentage was 20.85. *Similarly, there were 504 female workers per 1000 male workers in 1901, in 1981, there were just 367.* And, a large chunk of these women is engaged in, to use Herbert Simon's expression, programmed action or routinized and unsophisticated jobs. As a result, the first sword of modernization and greater mechanization in industry falls on women. They are thrown out of employment. The author is at present conducting the fieldwork of a batch of students of the Sociology Department of the Calcutta University in a jute mill in Khardah area. She sadly notes the declining number of women in the work force, lower wages for women workers, and how women workers, the record of whose absenteeism is almost nil, have to go without work, while their male counterparts among whom absenteeism is high do not find much difficulty in getting a day's work from the management. The despair of women workers because of this discrimination is beyond any measure.



In the informal sector which claims the larger bulk of the female work force in the country the picture is sadder still. Industry in this sector prefers women because they are cheaper, can easily be cheated and will not unionize. Since they belong to the small sector, the employers are able to avoid giving them any protection in terms of maternity leave, creches and minimum wages. The situation is aggravated in the areas declared as Free Trade and Export Promotion Zones, e.g., Kandla Free Trade Zone. In cases where readymade garments, knitting units, electronic units, etc., are operating, bulk of the labour is recruited through unlicensed contractors and the majority of women workers are below 20 and are unmarried. The work-day of these girls starts at 4 a.m. and ends at 10 p.m., because they have to do the house work also. And, herein lies a major source of violence to women. Irrespective of the class to which a woman belongs, house work is her responsibility. The sexual division of work in the family is very sharp and pronounced. The perpetuation of the resultant double burden makes the life of a working woman full of strains and tension. Even if a husband wants to help his wife, the wife herself refuses the help – she is forced to do it because of the severe criticism from her in-laws or neighbours. The husband would be dubbed a hen-pecked husband and the fear of this stigma is so strong in our actual life as the husband in most of the cases has to withdraw. The dictate of the cultural milieu that running the household and rearing up of children are the tasks of the wife and the mother is so thoroughly imbibed by the women in our society, because of the existing pattern of enculturation and socialisation, as the working mothers suffer an acute sense of guilt for the alleged neglect of their children and suffer the resultant role-conflict (Chakraborty, 1978).

The status of woman gets increasingly devalued as a result. And, the most horrible expression is the abuse of amniocentesis (Shukla Kulkarni and Patel, 1987). Techniques such as sonography, fetoscopy, needling, chorion biopsy and the most popular one – amniocentesis are increasingly becoming household names in India. These tests are conducted mainly for sex-determination and thereafter extermination of female foetus through abortions in private clinics, private hospitals and government hospitals. Women are rendered, consequently “male – child – producing – machines”.

In other countries, this test is very expensive and under strict governmental control, while in our country it can be conducted within

the sums from Rs. 200/- to Rs. 500/-. Hence, not only the upper class people but even working class people can easily avail themselves of this "facility". "A survey of several slums in Bombay showed that many women had undergone the test and, after knowing that the sex of the foetus was female, had undergone abortion in the 18th or 19th week of pregnancy. Their argument was that it was better to spend Rs. 200 of even Rs. 800 now than to give birth to a female baby and spend thousands of rupees for her marriage later on" (Ibid : 14). And, it happens in a country where female infanticide has been part of its culture. We know of Rajasthan. But S. Krishnaswamy draws our attention to the "custom of female infanticide in India, in general, and among the Kallars of Madurai district in Tamilnadu, in particular" (1988 : 186) Krishnamurthy wonders how a practice which was related to a primitive or undeveloped socio-economic situation could perpetuate through the last quarter of the twentieth century. Krishnamurthy shows how the villagers hatch and perpetuate a conspiracy of silence, which results into concealment of cases of deaths of babies under unnatural circumstances to the police or administrative authorities. When a society accepts it as legitimate, it will, no wonder, find wife-beating on the slightest pretext (Flavia, 1988) or bride – burning because of the failure of the bride's parents to satisfy the demand of dowry by the groom's family (Ghadially and Kumar, 1988) only natural. Further, the increase in the incidences of reported cases of abatement to suicides by women (see the table at the end) in this State may be an indicator of the intensification of violence by the society towards women. What is disconcerting is the doubling of figure of crimes against women in this State. One may say, that the figure indicates the more rigorous enforcement of the police and administrative measures in the State. But, that does not negate the picture of the negative and destructive attitude of the society towards women.

And, the most disappointing fact is the abatement of violence to women by women themselves who have been nurtured in the norms and values of a male-dominated society.

Social workers and voluntary organizations and women's associations will have to concentrate on this area and direct their energy to alter the women's attitude first. The task is an uphill one in the face of the obstacles put by the dominant males in the society. But the challenge must be taken – here and now.

Statement of crimes against women : whole years, 1987 and 1988

Sl. No.	Year	Murder 302 IPC	Culpable homicide not amounting to murder	Cruelty women & abate- ment to suicide 498 A/306 IPC.	Attempt to Murder 307 IPC.	Grievous hurt. 326 IPC.	Kidnapping 365 IPC.	Rape 376 IPC.	Dowry death 304 B IPC.	Cruelty to women 498 A	Total
1.	1987	289	73	342	29	13	24	219	226	289	1504
2.	1988	254	66	744	48	50	54	492	524	1137	3390
Total		543	139	1086	77	63	78	711	750	1426	4894

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TUG OF WAR—A SERIOUS GAME FOR WORKING WOMEN : A CASE STUDY OF THE WOMEN OFFICERS IN THE BANKING INDUSTRY



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"Home is a girl's prison and the women's workhouse"

George Bernard Shaw

[I]

Many questions amply demonstrate the feeling : Why is a female child still considered a burden ? Why is sonography gaining popularity in deciding the sex of the child before birth ? Why does incident like Roop Kanwar's Sati – Daho still happen ? Why is dowry system still prevalent in India ?

India is the second largest country in Asia with a population of 331 Million female as per the census of 1981 compared to 354 million male. Instead of taking advantage of this natural resource of labour in a proper way, India has malutilised this resource. The following table confirms the low participation of women in various industrial categories in the tertiary sector.

Percentage Distribution of Women Workers by Industrial Categories during 1961 & 1981 periods in Tertiary Sector.

<u>Industrial Category</u>	<u>Female</u>		<u>Males</u>	
	<u>1971</u>	<u>1981</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1981</u>
Trade & Commerce	1.8	2.0	6.4	7.4
Transport, Storage & Communication	0.5	0.4	2.9	3.4
Other Services	7.1	7.0	9.1	9.0
Tertiary Sector	9.4	9.4	18.4	19.8

Source : Census of India 1981, Series I, India, Part IV-A.

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Perhaps the visibility of educated women in positions of power and a number of dignified nationalist women like Sarojini Naidu, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Vijayalaxmi Pandit and later Indira Gandhi holding high positions of decision-making generated an illusion about Indian women occupying equal status with men. But what is the reality ?

The reality has been vividly pointed out in the report of the Committee on the Status of Women (1974) and in other subsequent studies.

This enquiry, however, does not claim to be the first of its kind. Researches in this field have already been done in abroad as well as in India. These studies highlight the basic dilemma of a working woman : the conflict between the traditional callings and the demands of the modern era.

According to Western writers, reasons behind the relative low status of women in the labour market resolve around (1) sex differences propagated by psychologists and (ii) gender role research deriving concepts from the perspectives of sociologists such as Mead, Parsons and Merton focussing on the role conflict.

Both the approaches focus on the emotional and cognitive traits of each sex, e.g., female passivity, male assertiveness and thereby sex-linked abilities. The theorists exemplifying the importance of the first approach maintain that sex differences in social roles, beliefs, attitudes are due to basic biological differences between the sexes.

The scientists emphasising differentiation on the basis of gender roles accuse the socialisation pattern of children. The agents of socialisation nurture the children according to the stereotyped behaviours of males and females. Males are viewed as assertive, active, adventurous, independent, logical, competitive, able to make decision easily and self-confident and always acting as leader (Boverman et. al., 1975). A relative absense of these traits characterises the typically stereo-typic perceptions of women, that is, they are dependent, subjective, passive, non-competitive, illogical, etc. However, they are also believed to possess illuminating qualities such as being gentle, sensitive to the feeling of others, tactful, neat, quiet— items which are referred to as the 'warmth' and 'expressiveness' of the women. Many have reiterated that for these attributes women are sometimes preferred more than men, e.g., in nurturing profession, but, in practice they are discrimi-

nated against the opposite counterpart. Girls are discouraged from thinking of themselves as having a career when they are adults. Instead they are socialised to find their satisfaction from supporting their husbands and children's search for personal fulfilment while sacrificing their own needs (Klein, 1965; Gavron, 1966; Fogarty, 1971; Glazer, 1977; Stead, 1978).

To understand the Indian psyche it is essential to enumerate the works of the Indian analysts.

[II]

The point to be noticed at the outset is that every conceivable approach by the Indian researchers concerned with the problems of middle class women ultimately converge on the importance of the role conflict. Role conflict faced by women are of three types as identified by Greenhaus and Bentell, 1985; Goldsmith, 1989) – (a) time-based conflict in which the time demands of one role interfere with participation in the other role; (b) strain-based conflict where the stress symptoms (e.g., fatigue, irritability) produced in one role intrude into the other role; and (c) behaviour-based conflict in which behaviours that are functional in one role are dysfunctional in the other role.

A working woman has to simultaneously play a number of roles (Chakraborty, 1978). These roles stretch in different directions in response to their relationships with particular social institutions, and what is apparent is that the value system attached to these institutions often conflicts directly with those attached to the roles women wish to play. A person whose work commitment structurally conflicts with family activities sometimes may experience psychological conflict. This conflict again may be heightened when demands of both the worlds, namely, work and family, are strong and nearly equal and the incumbent cannot decide which world to give priority at a particular time (Chakraborty, 1978; Greenphaus, 1989).

[III]

Motherhood in the present world is demanding and the multidimensional activities inevitably restrict the freedom that the 'new woman' has been encouraged to accept due to legal, constitutional, educational and political changes. In the work situation many of the attitudes towards women are based firmly on the past ideologies

which ignore the realities of the present. As Nancy Seear (1964), said, "We give women enormous responsibility as mothers and we reject them as managers; why?" "Men", said one of Elaine Grande's (1961) correspondents, "get the best out of life, for no one asks them to turn into house-husbands when they get married" (Gavron, 1966).

Leela Dube (1988) stated that the gender differences that are culturally produced are almost invariably interpreted as being rooted in biology as part of 'natural order of things'. The social arrangement is such that men and women have unequal rights, positions and rules both as brother and sister, and as husband and wife. This, as perceived by some, is due to the arrangement of nature which assigns unequal roles to the two genders in procreation, when it is the process of socialisation and the nurturing of the girls which emphasize bowing down before the wishes of her husband and her family (Dube, 1988; Ramu, 1989). Submissiveness and obedience are regarded as feminine ideals.

Secondly, it is being said that in India men are preferred as workers because, among other things, they play the customary role of being the main providers of the family (Hood, 1983). Such insight has been rejected by many late social scientists with the increase in the participation of women in the labour force. Later studies have proved otherwise.

Further, because of nuclearisation of family structure, the tasks and responsibilities of modern working wives have increased (Chakraborty, 1978). And, homemaking in urban middle class families has been raised to a fine art, the trifling details of which assume exaggerated importance. The modern woman is expected to be attentive to the children and her studies, as it is her task to supervise and socialise the children, to keep the home clean and decorated, to prepare varied menu, to play hostess of guests and friends to the family. Food must be planned and prepared daily. And in the evening the husband wants the wife beside him, at his beck and call.

The forgoing discussion makes it clear that working women in India are faced with immense dilemmas as they have to do double work (Omvedt, 1979). Consequently, conflict and strain are obvious. The problem of overload further heightens as here, in India, part-time jobs are not easily available. Slogging in full time jobs entail long working hours away from home.

As practised, it is the lady of the house who is expected to take leave from the office in case of mishappening at home e.g., children's illness, absence of maid servants, entertaining guests, and attending social functions (Ramu, 1989). So employers are sometimes reluctant to entrust any responsibility with women in various professions and occupations because of the problems of 'frequent absenteeism' and 'special facilities' required by women. Almost all the employers believe that married women suffer from inevitable disadvantages arising from their dual roles at home and office (Kapur, 1974). Moreover, in the work front, women face the problem of being treated as only sex objects (cf. *Eve's Weekly*, 1973, p. 38). Women, be they engineers, executives, lawyers, or students, are all viewed as women and women alone (cf. Sapru, 1973, p. 65).

Though with the growth of modern administration, women have made some gains in the service sector like teaching, nursing, health services, they are discouraged from participating in the non-traditional fields like engineering, high finance, or corporate management (Gulhati, 1990). So much so, even after 40 years of independence, the highest position in these services are held by men. Employers still hesitate to involve women in these jobs (Gulhati, 1990; Banerjee, 1990). The question automatically arises as to whether this hesitation is based on any substantial ground or whether it is only a prejudice against women. Hence it is quite relevant to hold empirical inquiries to see whether women, when employed in non-traditional jobs (executive cadre), can justify the same.

METHOD

The target population of the present study is the women officers in the banking industry in West Bengal.

The term 'officer' has been used in this inquiry to mean a person who is answerable for his or her work to a superior, who is responsible for the work assigned by him or her to a subordinate and who in daily course of work is called upon to take some decisions independently.

It was decided to conduct the survey in the city of Calcutta. Banking institution was identified as the field of the study as commerce and banking, i.e., the tertiary sector has come to occupy a major place in the corporate world and it is regarded as an indispensable machinery of modernisation. Only nationalised banks have been included in the

study for their typical Indian characteristics. Also, these banks welcome the participation of women unlike their foreign counterparts.

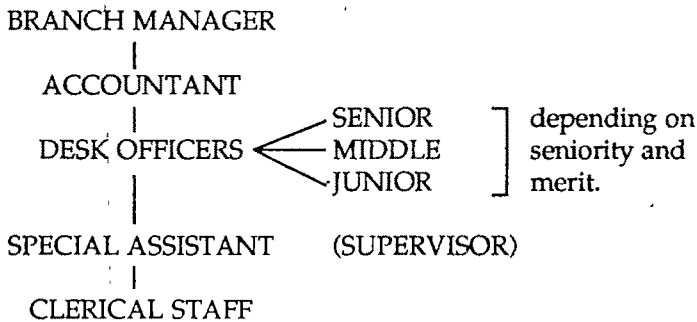
A sample of 50 officers was chosen of which 24 were males and 26 females. The sample was limited to the Hindu, Bengali Officers who are married and have child(ren). A comparative study of both the genders was considered appropriate to cement the authenticity of the work.

The respondents were drawn on the basis of purposive sampling and the age of the interviewees varied between 33 and 49. This stage in the life cycle is regarded as most hazardous and important one from the point of view of establishing the career and family. The mean age of the male officers and female officer were respectively : 41.96 years and 39.92 years; number of graduates : 18 and 15 respectively compared to only 5 and 11 post graduates; mean income of the officers was Rs. 5250, the same for both men and women; number of nucleated family structure : 19 and 18 respectively; average number of children : 1.29 and 1.46 respectively; age of the youngest child : 1 year and 14 months respectively.

The respondents belonged to the Scale I and II grades of the banking institution corresponding with junior and middle management level. These executives are called 'desk officers' who work generally on the six-monthly basis, being transferred from one department to another such as *Advance*, where the officer has to supervise the approval and realisation of advances; *Bills*, which is related to tasks involving other banks and maintenance of books; *Deposits*, comprising three subsections – Term, Savings and Current – where the officer has to look into the deposits and accounts newly opened in the bank and also to 'allure' as many customers as possible; *Personnel*, which takes care of the need and requirements of all the bank employees; *Foreign Exchange*, where officer has to deal with foreign exchange rates and transaction of foreign currencies; *Clearing*, which handles the deposits of all cheques; *Cash*, a complementary the clearing which deals with Cash Deposits; *General*, where main concern is to look after officer fixtures, furniture and stationaries; and *Accounts*, the most important department handling daily transactions, i.e., debit and credit of the accounts.

The above mentioned rotational system is practised as a safeguard against corruption. It also enables the officer to be conversant with the function of each and every section of the bank, a requisite for promotion.

Each branch of the bank has an organisational structure. In the smaller branches the officers are directly accountable to the Branch Manager whereas in the bigger ones they report to the Accountant working directly under the Branch Manager. On the other hand, the clerical supervisor is, in turn, accountable to the desk officers concerned and acts as a buffer between officers and clerical staff. The smaller branches do not have any clerical supervisor; so the clerical staff reports to the officers directly.



The methods used for collecting data included personal interview of about two hours approximately and informal discussions with some of the branch managers. These discussions helped to increase validity of data. Occasionally the researcher also had the opportunity to observe the respondents at work and their interactions with their colleagues. The data were collected by the researcher herself.

RESULTS

The present study is organised around the experiences of 50 officers of nationalised banks in Calcutta. Such a small sample is, obviously, not adequate to establish the current position of women executives in general. However, as these respondents belong to the typical Indian society, one will accept that their experiences can at least highlight the reality.

The inquiry reveals that the interface of work and family lives creates a complex framework within which our working women survive and suffer. Women are making tremendous efforts to combine home and work, still they are ambiguous regarding their endeavours in building their career. This is mainly due to the result of the influence of our traditional and cultural values.

The study unveils that women officers typically bear primary responsibility for their households unlike their male counterparts. They handle more of the household chores and child rearing activities than their spouses. Though married and working, women still live within the patriarchal male dominated society. Hence employed outside no matter how prestigious and lucrative it may be, does not absolve women from their familial role. By and large, Indian husbands are not prepared to share household responsibilities and parental duties. The fact that only 3 out of 24 male officers have gainfully employed spouses elucidates that husbands are still not prepared to relinquish their patriarchal privileges. The time-based conflict, as discussed earlier, rears its ugly head due to the urge of female officers to be equally efficient and successful at work and at home. Concentration in office and the consequent neglect of household chores leads to a deepening feeling of inefficiency as a partner and uselessness as a mother. They expiate their work status by occupying the lower administrative echelons of banking industry.

Long working hours are 'rewarded' with equally tiresome sojourns in the kitchen. The elaborate food habit of the 'Bengali – family' is an additional hindrance to female officers. 18 out of 26 female executives have nuclear families, which implies that these women hardly have any helping hand to ease their burdens. Moreover, husbands are not generally ready to participate in domestic work owing to prevalent norms and values.

'Adjusting work with home is my primary sphere of tension'—this statement by a female officer of the Administrative Department personifies the typical situation. She has deliberately chosen working in the Administrative Department because it calls for regular office hours and the officers do not have to be present beyond this time frame. This has been reiterated by her colleagues too.

Another lady officer asserted that the problem of adjustment of work with home occasionally prompts women employees to seek refuge in the Savings Department, as here too an employee can complete his/her work within the stipulated office hours.

On the other hand, prolonged office hours beyond 5 P.M. is a functional requirement and inevitable feature of the Foreign Exchange Department. Perhaps that is why female officers do not like to work in this department.

Female desk officers, hence, run the risk of playing 'limited' role within the organisation. They are 'restricted' to some specific departments only. This has a tremendous impact on their career. As mentioned earlier, the banking institution comprises many departments, viz., Administrative, Deposits, Personnel, Advance, Cash, Clearing, Bills, Foreign Exchange, Accounts and General. As a matter of practice, an officer is expected to gain experience in all the departments by working there, and this stimulates opportunities for promotion. The inquiry explicitly points out that the female officers cannot exploit this rotational system to their benefits, and this is a major reason for their being saturated in the lower rung of the banking hierarchy.

Yet another shortcoming like high frequency of absenteeism on the part of the women officers, in comparison to their male counterparts, is also highlighted by the survey. Absenteeism in industry as a rule, comes under two headings; absence through sickness and so-called voluntary absenteeism. The second category may have a variety of causes: fatigue due to long hours of work and travel, domestic responsibilities, transport problems, shopping requirements, psychological reasons, such as lack of incentive, lack of interest in the job, and so on.

Though the sickness rate among women is higher than that among men, the large difference in hours of work lost arises from other causes, chiefly connected with responsibilities at home. It must be noted that voluntary absenteeism has little meaning while judging a lady officer's behaviour. If her husband, child or parents-in-law are unwell, it is she who is required to stay at home as if she herself were ill!

Incidence of illness among children is much higher than that among adult and consequently – children being the mother's charge – the rate of absenteeism is higher among female executives. Female officers may sometimes be compelled to leave office before their male colleagues – to attend to household needs. The fair sex is then 'ostracised' from handling responsible assignment. As the male officers can work late, they are preferred by the superiors during exigencies as was emphasised by a female respondent. Many of her colleagues feel that the superiors should take quality of work as a parameter for measuring job performance and not the amount or quantity of time spent in the office. They stated that their early departure from office gives their counterpart a chance to tease them, even when the work output of women at every hour is more than the men. Women officers do not waste time in idle talks or smoking.

Moreover, the compulsion to be homeward bound immediately after the scheduled office hours prevents these women officers from fraternising with top managers. Although such occasions are not the only way to enhance one's career, they definitely provide a scope for personal 'publicity'.

For women officers, the return from offices means entry to household chores. There is little time to devote oneself to the reading of bank bulletins having updated information. And there is no free time to prepare for the mandatory promotion examination. Here, men have an added advantage. They do not have to think about the home and children while preparing for the examinations. In addition, they get their wives' support, a privilege not enjoyed by female officers in general.

This inquiry also reveals that despite the increase in the number of dual-career families, women, unlike men, are still socialised for subordinating their career to family. Physical mobility is negatively viewed since it implies freedom of movement and pursuit of personal advancement for self-actualisation. Women are taught to be more sensitive to 'psychic costs' of moving : seperation from friends and familiar surroundings, disruption of child-care arrangements, contact with strangers and loss of a secure environment. Respondents have stated that as women mostly avoid geographical mobility, their career suffers to a great extent. In due course, therefore, non-participation of women executives in the Advance Department has almost become sacrosanct. As per the regulation of the banking industry the Advance Department necessitates inspection of the client's workplace who have taken loans or have applied for loans from the bank. The thin representation of the women in this department is, however, not only because of the double burden of the females. The environmental insecurity faced by them is a major factor here. It is commonly believed that women are physically inferior to men. Sometimes a customer or a client may not be within easy reach of the bank. In such cases, women officers hesitate to take the risks of travelling alone for inspection and talk business with an almost unknown person.

However, the more confident and smart lady officers claim that inspection is branch manager's duty. A woman executive, they feel, can definitely manage the functioning of this department with a little help from the branch manager who can assist the lady officers during inspection or provide here with a office car and driver.

Personal inhibition with regard to geographical mobility is also responsible for the avoidance of rural assignments by the women, though this has become an essential requisite for being considered for future promotion at present. In most cases the women do not want to disrupt their household to move on if, and when, the job demands it. Further as emphasized by a lady officer, congestion (a part and parcel of Calcutta), frequent waterlogging in rainy seasons, and sporadic political disturbances like 'bandh', procession, etc, impede smooth mobility in and out of the city. In most of the other States of India, the rural branches are readily accessible from cities through less strenuous transportation. In normal course it takes almost 6 hours to reach a rural branch and to return thereafter. For a woman to be away from home for such a long hours is mentally and physically very tiring, inconvenient and irritating.

The gravity of the situation is accentuated by the regulation of the Government (introduced in 1987) which states that to be promoted higher than the Scale II, Junior Officers must fulfill rural assignment for a 3 year period at least. Women Officers who do not go to rural branches by choice, subsequently get stuck in their careers. The fact that 11 lady officers out of 26 interviewed have avoided promotion to the next grade of the organisational pyramid, highlights this difficulty faced by female respondents.

Informal conversation with female officers brought out yet another problem which is predominantly psychological. A woman executive faces different types of confusion when she is the boss and has male subordinates. If she happens to be reserved, stern and strict with her male subordinates, thereby demanding discipline and efficiency in work, she is looked upon with contempt from them. On the other hand, if she is polite, courteous and lenient she is taken to be inefficient as a boss. The male colleagues bring their fossilised notions about women's supplementary role to the office and find it difficult to accept a "sareed boss". Initially they do not co-operate as they are not conditioned to think of women as superiors. Women counterparts might very often get classified according to feminine gender stereotype whether or not their personal characteristics are consistent with it. Such stereotype is inculcated into the women to such an extent that female subordinates cannot always accept a woman as their superior. They do not concede even the success of their friends who make an effort to cater to the requirements of the departments where avoidance of working has been accepted formally. An example may be cited to establish this

aspect. An aspiring lady officer who shouldered the demands of the Foreign Exchange Department soon turned out to be as an object of jealousy among her female contemporaries. They blamed her for betraying the unwritten rule of conduct of women. The victimised officer, in order to keep a smooth functioning relationship, was forced to curtail her ambition. The others believed that by setting an example before the Branch Manager their colleague threatened the restricted boundary of their movements which was reasonably created by them to accommodate the 'callings' of both house and the work.

As women enter a position which calls for greater investment of time and energy, they face inconveniences. It has been observed from the field work (a fact agreed upon by atleast 8 women officers), that female executives have to work harder in getting their achievement noticed because of the negative stereotypical attitude of men, the low expectation women have of themselves and comparatively lower appraisal of women by both genders. However, they also feel, that the management is becoming alert to the fact that women executives have confidence in their ability to compete and meet the standards required of a job, and that they want to be accepted, evaluated, promoted and rewarded as individual, not as women. This study highlights that reconciliation of work and home become easier for the lady executives recruited directly through banking examination (in contrast to 'Promotee' officers who have achieved appointments through seniority), since they come prepared to accept responsibilities and challenges. These women who possess a less non-traditional attitude toward 'gender roles' presume that the management (Superiors) relies more on them. Nevertheless, of late, women officers, irrespective of whether they are directly recruited or promoted, are competing for 'difficult' posts like that of an Accountant. To become an Accountant implies she cannot be absent from the office without prior notice nor can she be late to the office, for she would be in charge of the key to the cash safe. In bigger branches the Accountant is a person to whom all the officers are accountable. So being employed as an Accountant signifies high prestige and responsibility.

Moreover, the fair sex perceives that women executives enjoy greater ability in handling inter personal relationships, as illustrated by one lady officer who stated that undue preference for women in 'credit-card mobilisation' could be attributed simply to the pleasing nature and better 'public-relations' of women officers. Women are said to be more tactful in dealing with credit-cards. To some, howbeit, this is a form of unconscious utilisation of sex.

Again, to female respondents, placement of women in the Personnel Department is due to their sincerity, which the management acknowledges from time to time. The Personnel Department invokes confidential tasks that should not be leaked out. A woman is believed to mix around less freely and have less contact with her colleagues. Thus she has less scope for turning secrets into public news.

Of course, answers to these questions like whether the preference for women in 'credit-card' mobilisation is an example of sexual exploitation and whether working in Personnel Department epitomises more prestige than placement in the other departments have not been confirmed by this inquiry. They need further analysis and clarification.

Men, however, assess the accusations of their counterparts as frail excuses : 'Women are simply not interested in developing their knowledge', said one male officer. They feel that lady officers take advantage of their domestic duty as it provides an excuse for the work front. In practice, it is the chair that gives the power irrespective of gender. To substantiate their claimant the men emphasised the lack of ambition on the part of their women colleagues and their relative satisfaction with present positions. Though 14 women respondents acquiesce to this feeling, others have generated a somewhat different viewpoint : 'I am not overwhelmingly ambitious but I am very interested in my current work', says one of the women officers, in reply to the question : Are women ambitious enough to be successful in the world of work ?

Before summing up the report, the present investigation would like to point out a new dimension of the problem. Informal discussions with a Branch manager revealed that the Government policies are largely responsible for the 'lazy' culture which has developed in most of the nationalised banks. His opinion corresponds to what Hrishikes Bhattacharyya (1986) deduced from his survey. There has been communication failure together with bureaucratic management practices. The old concept of banking has been totally replaced by a new concept – the concept of mass banking – of which nobody had any clear idea. This dampened the esteem needs of the managers and officers and, as a result, their hierarchy of needs has suffered a set back. The survey also made clear that the same feeling is shared by male and female officers. Nevertheless, it should be noted that this inquiry did not probe the extent to which this dissatisfaction has become universal.

CONCLUSION

Men and women have different expectations regarding the appropriateness of jobs for them. Women are faced with more constraints in the workplace. Women have less opportunity to insulate their family life from their work life. Family remains the primary consideration to women even now, and, consequently women are more willing to pay a high price for it. Husbands and wives do not accommodate themselves to each other's career to the same extent. The wives are generally expected more to move or otherwise adapt themselves to their husbands' careers.

In India 'career girl' is a term which is often used in a derogatory sense and a 'career woman' is viewed as an aggressive, unfeminine creature who adopts a profession as a compensation for emotional unfulfilment or because she is compelled to work by the harsh economic realities of life. So even if a woman wants to develop her career whole-heartedly, she is unsure of pursuing it due to the social stigma that is associated with a 'career woman'. But why should a social stigma be attached to the 'career woman' only and not to the 'career man'? Why is a woman still satisfied with her job at the bottom of the official hierarchy? It is simply because they cannot overlook the differential attitudes incorporated with their jobs. The most shattering aspect is that society blames women for their unequal performance, when in reality it is the society which nurtures this inequality through the emphasis on primacy of home over work for the so called 'Weaker Sex'.

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REGENERATING INDIA'S CITIES

UDAYAN MAJUMDAR*

Notwithstanding that most Indian cities were "chance-directed, chance-erected" and began as trading posts to serve the mercantile interests of the colonial rulers, the 3245 urban settlements in the country today, together, are the natural habitat of 200 million modern-day Indians. And despite their present parlous state, they are not considered undesirable alternatives to the rural past.

Nonetheless, India's cities face some of their most intractable problems in their *inner cities* where life embraces a range of environmental problems that interact with social and economic conditions to endanger the survival of our cities.

Inner cities, of course, have no classifiable boundaries setting them apart from the rest of the urban area and generally include the densely populated, deteriorating older parts of cities, as well as, the homes of urban India's 40 million squatter population (expected to increase to 80 million by 2000 A.D.) which usually intertwine with or encircle the centre of cities. More accurately, *inner cities* are people who have been left behind by history and prosperity, when society and the economy moved on, when patterns of work and demography changed.

The environmental problems easily recognizable in the *inner city* are : air pollution which lays its pall most heavily over the *inner city*; lack of open space, parks and recreational opportunities; noise; lack of sanitation and potable water supply; crime; awful schools, congestion; and general corrosiveness. Added to these are the problems of overcrowding, ill-ventilated dwellings in a poor state of repair, squalid slums, unemployment, poor street lighting, rats, narrow streets that are unsuitable for motor vehicles or in many instances for the volume of pedestrian traffic to which they are subjected, and everpresent litter and garbage.

Of course, a lot of urban renewal activities based on Western concepts of city planning and urban redevelopment have been initiated by the government as well as quasi-government and private agencies since the beginning of the seventies.

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Outdated central districts and residential zones have been redeveloped in Bombay, Hyderabad, Calcutta, Lucknow and several other cities, and old shophouses replaced with multi-storey blocks of flats – at an immense social and human cost though.

The proliferation of high-rises in India's cities, especially in the major metropolises, have led to dire consequences in terms of disrupting the social fabric. In several instances poor quality construction and inadequate maintenance have further compounded the difficulties. Much of the indigenous architecture and buildings of historical merit have also been lost.

Furthermore, many old communities have been broken up and much of the character that differentiated one *inner city mohalla* from another has been lost.

The *mohallas* are spatial units encompassing the entire gamut of familial and socio-cultural relationships among its individual residents, creating in a sense, a large extended family. They are not only means of shelter but also thresholds of strong, traditional, social and communal organizations that provide the *inner city* slum dwellers with essential social support in unemployment and other occasions of difficulty and stress.

The renewal authorities' argument, however, in favour of applying Western planning and architectural concepts in doing urban renewal in India is that, metropolises being premier control centres for the national economy ought to be efficiently designed. But such renewal, apart from making the city resemble Jeremy Bentham's model prison – a gigantic panopticon, its famed diversity of life-styles barely managing to hide the fundamental monotonous uniformity of its life-patterns – also denies the labouring poor occupying the *inner city* slums their right to the city.

Moreover, from the pressure on our cities to develop new economic survival strategies, a lot of undesired inter-urban competition has resulted. But there are severe limitations to this new cosmopolitanism, generated by a "voodoo economics" that masks social malaise under the pleasant facade of glitzy, image-conscious renovations. Indeed, Indian cities have become centres of conspicuous consumption and of potentially dangerous poverty at the same time.

Nonetheless, the survival of cities actually depend on a very conscious acceptance of their values and on the fashioning of renewal

policies at all levels, that nurture cities without neglecting the needs of suburbs or rural areas, and that also fulfils the aspirations and requirements of the different sections of the population living in cities, especially the low-income population in *inner cities*. Conflict of interests and values exist, but surely they can be mediated by careful analysis and intelligent choices.

It is not the physical but the social, human, and economic considerations that deserve the greatest attention. The city in India can be revived not by focussing on aesthetics, but on issues of distributive justice.

Instead of going overboard about architectural grandeur, one must identify what is most importantly at stake in the design of cities – the lives of millions of poor. Any attempt at regenerating India's cities will thus, necessarily have to commence with efforts at alleviating urban poverty. For, the principal concern of the urban poor is employment. Housing is second.

The city's poor prefer living in the crowded *inner city* locations because the chances of finding jobs, especially the unskilled, casual jobs for which time are most eligible, are so much higher in the central core than anywhere else. Moreover, being near job markets also saves on transport costs and time.

This explains why schemes for rehousing the *inner city* slum dwellers into conventional dwelling units by the government and other non-governmental agencies have been mostly rendered exercises in futility. The poor have all sold away their acquired resource (in the form of housing) only to meet their primary needs (such as food consumption and other bare essentials) due to lack of employment.

Given their meagre income, and the incompatibility of the free market in urban land with the free market in labour, the poor are hardly left with much choice in terms of shelter. Obviously then, faced with the steep hike in housing prices, beyond their affordable realms, slum dwellers see their makeshift huts as a solution rather than a problem. They may be ugly, insanitary, illegal, but they nevertheless serve as shelters within affordable realms.

Evidently then, the huge industry of government or government supported agencies, set up to tackle India's metropolitan have hardly been effective in their task of checking *inner city* decline and alleviating urban poverty.

Nearly all approaches to urban renewal in India till date have been fragmented ones – dealing separately with causes and effects – and, as a result, have been generally inadequate in dealing with the interdependent nature of the *inner city* environment. Renewal programmes, however, in order to be successful, must be designed to be responsive to local priorities and also to support a multifaceted attack on *inner city* problems.

Government renewal programmes have also resulted in failure due to their inability to involve the *inner city* residents themselves. Again, the way financial assistance is provided for urban renewal, also impedes the *inner city* regeneration process. For, the prevalent funding programmes have all denied our cities the choice of setting their own priorities and forced them instead to choose among priorities offered by the Central Government or any other funding agency concerned. The problem is carried further when urban renewal programmes in cities require matching funds which are usually unavailable or which the city prefers to utilise on other programmes that are not centrally funded.

What then is the way out ?

Alternative schemes of action, it seems, can come neither from the government nor from the various agencies that represent the elitist order of things but only from among the people themselves. For, the urban poor themselves know best. If only the government could manipulate land valuation, city planning, and housing policies to work along with popular aspirations rather than against them, the urban poor could well manage their own future.

This idea of engaging popular efforts to regenerate India's *inner cities* may apparently seem a pipe dream to many. Nonetheless, considering the present economic crisis, and also that if the problem of unemployment should deepen, if the Indian economy should fail to make a strong recovery over the long pull, an alternative renewal plan grounded in popular participation may well be the only alternative to poverty in urban India.

There have, in fact, been successful projects in several countries, in which people have built or reconditioned their own housing (usually in some form of cooperative), and in helping themselves have mastered skills which make them employable. Moreover, these activities also lead to economic revival and offer an escape route from the

current urban cul-de-sacs. And in the process will also help transform the Indian city from parasite (that drains regional and national economies of resources for the enrichment of privileged urban classes) into a stage for the creation of a culturally authentic and socially progressive life.

Availability of soft credit facilities, government support, cheap premises, and setting up of small organisations for mutual assistance could actually help improve the conditions of the *inner city* residents. The idea is to give people a genuine voice in their own affairs. And then people themselves can help themselves, since it is only their own plan of action – geared less to individual market demand than to socially recognized needs that are so much more urgent – that actually addresses their genuine needs.

Of course, employment remains the most important aspect of urban renewal, for, even if houses are very cheap and available on easy terms people cannot buy them if they are unemployed and this will automatically lead to the increase of *inner city* shanty towns.

Finally, small community workshops could also be a veritable seedbed of technological advancement and an aid to industrial flexibility. Especially because current technology is on their side. In training the unskilled, these community workshops could play a very positive role in encouraging entrepreneurship in the field of low-cost housing for the low-income population. But the government has to keep a regular check on escalating land values because high land values perpetuate poverty by rendering small workshops impossible.

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